United Nations A/55/1018

General Assembly

Distr.: General
18 July 2001

Original: English

Fifty-fifth session
Agenda item 103
Social development, including questions relating to the world social situation and to youth, ageing, disabled persons and the family

Letter dated 13 July 2001 from the Permanent Representative of Thailand to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to refer to the ceremony for the presentation of the Franklin Delano Roosevelt International Disability Award to Thailand, which was held at United Nations Headquarters on 2 July 2001. In this connection, may I take this opportunity to express Thailand's appreciation to you and Mrs. Nane Annan for attending the ceremony. I also wish to thank you personally for your inspiring remarks made at the opening of the ceremony. Last but not least, I wish to express our thanks and appreciation to the United Nations and its staff, including Ms. Gillian Martin Sorensen, Assistant Secretary-General for External Relations, for their cooperation and invaluable assistance in the preparation for the ceremony.

I believe that the presentation of this award underscores our shared goal and will help inspire many other countries to promote the rights and well-being of persons with disabilities, which is in keeping with the Charter of the United Nations, international human rights instruments and the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons, adopted by the General Assembly in 1982.

I would therefore like to request that the remarks made by Her Royal Highness, Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn of the Kingdom of Thailand, and Mr. Alan A. Reich, Chairman of the World Committee on Disability, as well as your remarks during the presentation ceremony be circulated as a document of the General Assembly at its fifty-fifth session under agenda item 103, Social development, including questions relating to the world social situation and to youth, ageing, disabled persons and the family (see annex).

(*Signed*) Asda **Jayanama**
Permanent Representative

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Annex to the letter dated 13 July 2001 from the Permanent Representative of Thailand to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I am most honored that His Majesty the King of Thailand entrusts me to represent him in accepting the 2001 Franklin Delano Roosevelt International Disability Award on behalf of the Kingdom of Thailand. Created in 1995 and named after a great statesman who was one of the founders of the United Nations, and one of the physically disabled himself, the Franklin Delano Roosevelt International Disability Award has become a source of encouragement for nations world over to work together towards the goal of full participation of citizens with disabilities as called for by the UN World Program of Action Concerning Disabled Persons.

In Thailand, for many decades, well before the adoption of this United Nations World Program of Action in 1982, all sectors of society - people with disabilities and people with diverse expertise - had come together to work for the benefits of people with disabilities. Our aim was to promote full participation of people with disabilities or people with special needs in the process of our national development towards peace and prosperity. People in the medical and related professions provide physical rehabilitation services as well as reduced causes of disabilities; legal groups worked for the enactment of legislation in favor of the rights of Thai citizens with

disabilities to acquire appropriate medical services and employment opportunities; educators and teachers offered instruction and training; architects designed suitable buildings; and innovators invented gadgets and tools to facilitate the physical mobility and improved the quality of life. Also participating in the process were social workers and therapists, and people who were responsible for the administration and funding.

The concerted efforts that I mentioned above have received continuous support from every government of Thailand.

His Majesty the King has always been working with keen interest for people with disabilities, for example, by initiating projects for the prevention of poliomyelitis and leprosy, projects and physical therapy and the production of prostheses, education of the people with disabilities, including many other smaller projects. His Majesty himself at times also gave music lessons for the blind.

As in these days, information and communication technology has become increasingly crucial in almost all aspects of our lives, equal access to the technology that would enable people with disabilities to participate fully in society is especially imperative. Ways and means must be found to enable disabled members of our society to take control of themselves. This, in essence, is the ultimate philosophy of self-reliance which is reflected in our Buddhist saying, and I quote:

"Oneself is refuge of oneself
what else indeed could refuge be?
By the good training of oneself
one gains a refuge hard to gain."

As a responsible member of the international community, Thailand has also been actively involved in promoting the well-being of people with special needs beyond our boundary. We, on our own, and in cooperation with international organizations, non-governmental organizations included, along with governments of various countries, have been supporting people in need of our funding and expertise. I would like to cite a new effort being promoted at present, namely the Asia and Pacific Center for Persons with Disabilities Project which is supported by both the Thai public and private sectors, namely, the Ministries of Labor, Public Health, Education and University Affairs, associations of people with all types of disabilities and foundations to assist people with disabilities of all kinds. This project aims at increasing the potentials and capability of all the agencies which handle the rehabilitation and development of people with disabilities in Thailand and in Asia and the Pacific region. It also encourages research to gain better knowledge and techniques as well as creates the network of regional organizations to serve the needs of persons with disabilities. It is hoped that this project will receive financial support from various agencies advocating this kind of principle and activities. On my part, I intend to allocate the contributions that come with the Franklin Delano Roosevelt' International Disability

Award as an initial fund for this compassionate and challenging project.

At this juncture, I wish to thank the prestigious Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt Institute and the World Committee on Disability for the distinguished award which will serve as the beacon of inspiration to Thai society, as well as to all the nations in the region. My appreciation goes also to all individuals involved in organizing this ceremony, in particular Mr. Alan Reich and Ms. Anne Roosevelt, who are with us here today. I also wish to thank, on behalf of Thailand, the Wheelchair Foundation represented here by Mr. Behring for donating 1,000 wheelchairs to people with disabilities in Thailand. Finally, I wish to thank you, Mr. Secretary General, for your distinguished presence here today.

Franklin Delano Roosevelt International Disability Award
Presentation to the Kingdom of Thailand
Acceptance by Her Royal Highness
Crown Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn
Remarks of Alan A. Reich, Chairman
World Committee on Disability
United Nations
July 2, 2001

Your Royal Highness, Mr. Secretary-General, U.N. Permanent Representatives from throughout the world, Distinguished Guests, and Fellow Members of the World Disability Community:

This is the fifth time we have gathered to present the Franklin D. Roosevelt International Disability Award to a U.N. member state. It marks a significant anniversary for the United Nations outreach to the world's disabled citizens.

As a symbol of progress for those determined to expand the participation of people with disabilities in the life of their societies, the FDR Award has now circled the globe. At the Roosevelt home in Hyde Park, New York, the Award was launched in 1995 on the 50th anniversary of the founding of the United Nations. In 1996, the first FDR Award went to the Republic of Korea. It was presented in San Francisco to President Kim. Prime Minister Jean Cretien next accepted the Award here at the U.N. for Canada, the following year President Mary McAleese for Ireland, and last year, President Arpad Goncz accepted it for the Republic of Hungary.

And so, today, with this presentation to the Kingdom of Thailand, the FDR Award has circumnavigated the globe. It is our first trip around the world, but hardly the last. There are many more such world journeys ahead because humankind faces a daunting task – bringing the promise of rights and opportunities and ultimately full participation in society to the world's 600 million men, women and children with disabilities.

The Kingdom of Thailand has distinguished herself by mounting an active national program to proclaim and support the rights of her citizens with disabilities. Thailand also is providing to them technical assistance and rehabilitative services – a reaffirmation of excellent ideas expressed by real material aid. The World Committee on Disability is proud to join with the Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt Institute and the United Nations in recognizing this nation with the FDR Award, accompanied by a $50,000 prize for an outstanding non-governmental disability organization within the Kingdom of Thailand.

Not only have we circled the globe, we have also crossed the millennial time line into a new era of hope. How do we translate that hope into reality to achieve the goals set forth by the U.N. for the world's disabled? That is our challenge to the world community, so often called to action by the United Nations.

This year, 2001, is the 20th anniversary of the United Nations International Year of the Disabled Persons. I was most proud on December 3, 1981 to address the U.N. General Assembly and join in the call on the nations of the world to adopt the U.N. World Programme of Action Concerning Disabled Persons. This guiding document has served us well, as so magnificently highlighted by the Kingdom of Thailand and the other FDR Award winning nations.

And now, two decades later, the time has come to call again on the United Nations, the member nations and the world community to move to the next level of protection and equalization of opportunities for people with disabilities – namely, a U.N. Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities. Such a convention is a natural extension of the U.N. World Programme of Action. Building on the progress so well demonstrated by the FDR Award recipient nations, a Convention would establish standards for commitment and action appropriate to the level of development of member nations. It would stimulate greater global and regional cooperation and implementation. Most important, by recognizing the significance

of our minority, it would raise hope that would energize and sustain our striving for a better future.

Several U.N. member nations already have indicated their support for a U.N. Convention. The need for it is growing. The catastrophes of the world such as disease, malnutrition, natural disasters have not abated. Nor has discrimination against people with disabilities, or other disablers such as war, accidents and landmines. Disability remains a vast global problem with 85% of the disabled living in developing nations where they are doubly disadvantaged by poverty and disability. The rights and access to opportunities of all disabled must be protected and championed at the highest levels. Indeed all mankind stands to gain through a United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities!

We must call upon the spirit of optimism that is the legacy of Franklin D. Roosevelt. We speak in that spirit, today, as we recognize the Kingdom of Thailand for her significant forward steps in improving the lives of its citizens with disabilities. We applaud the bold initiative of the Secretary-General this past week in mobilizing the world to combat AIDS. May your courageous undertaking, Mr. Secretary-General, lift this impending threat to human survival – and also help ease the burden of disability from too many of humankind's already bowed shoulders. May we show ourselves willing to bring new hope to 600 million people with disabilities, caught in a silent crisis that must be voiced, and heard, around the world.

Remarks delivered by the Secretary-General at the presentation of the Franklin Delano Roosevelt International Disability Award

New York, 2 July 2001

Let me start by saying that I am delighted to join you today for the presentation of this award, which furthers and inspires the legacy of President Roosevelt.

This annual ceremony draws much-needed attention to the rights and aspirations of people with disabilities -- an estimated 600 million men, women and children throughout the world. I would therefore like to congratulate the Roosevelt Institute and the World Committee on Disability for their strong and enduring commitment to this cause.

I would also like to say a special word of welcome to Her Royal Highness, Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn, who is here to accept the award on behalf of this year's recipient, the Kingdom of Thailand.

In the past decade, Thailand has made remarkable progress in supporting persons with disabilities and in giving this issue a prominent place in the national agenda.

The Government of Thailand has adopted innovative policies that will go a long way towards creating a society in which persons with disabilities enjoy equal opportunity, including their right to employment.

The Government has established a comprehensive national plan for the rehabilitation of persons with disabilities. It has started a fund to support businesses run by persons with disabilities, and it has taken steps to increase access to public transport.

Regional cooperation has also figured largely in the country's efforts, in the context of the Asian-Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons.

Thailand's National Institute of Development Administration and the Association of South-East Asian Nations organized a seminar on access to the Internet, and this was highly appreciated

Thailand has worked closely with the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific to raise awareness of disability issues.

And it played an important role in the adoption, last December, of the "Bangkok Millennium Declaration on the Promotion of the Rights of People with Disabilities in the Asia and Pacific Region".

Today's recognition is thus richly deserved, and I hope it will serve as an example to other nations.

The full equality of persons with disabilities, and their full participation in the social, economic and political life of their country, are two important objectives of the United Nations -- in keeping with the Charter, with international human rights instruments and with the World Programme of Action adopted by the General Assembly in 1982, which provides the basic framework for our work in this field.

If we are to fulfil the ambitious goals of the Millennium Declaration, we need everyone's talents, everyone's ideas, everyone's energies. We need to build a truly accessible society, which enables persons with disabilities to share the new opportunities created by globalization and the new information technologies. Their benefit will be our benefit; their success will be our success.

In that spirit, let us pay tribute to Thailand's achievements. And let us all reaffirm our determination to translate the principles of human dignity, equality and equity into action, thereby making an essential investment in our common future: a global society for all. That should be our goal -- a global society for all.